STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

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Plum Grove History

The home of Iowa's first territorial governor, Robert Lucas, is a small, two-story, red-brick home situated on four quiet, wooded acres. Lucas and his wife, Friendly, lived in the house from 1844 to 1853. Plum Grove has seven main rooms; four downstairs and three upstairs, plus an attached one-story kitchen. The home, with its modest furnishings, has been restored to appear as it would have when the Lucas' lived there.

Before Iowa became a state, it was a territory. Robert Lucas, former Governor of Ohio, was appointed in 1838 by the President of the United States, Martin Van Buren, to serve as the first Governor of the Territory of Iowa. When Robert Lucas arrived in Iowa in 1838, only 21 of the present day counties had been created out of the Black Hawk Purchase, the Half-Breed Tract, the Keokuk Reserve and the Second Black hawk Purchase.

In 1844, Robert and Friendly Lucas built a red brick Greek Revival style house. The house, surrounded by plum trees, was named Plum Grove. The Lucas family sold Plum Grove in 1866. It changed owners several times until purchased by the State of Iowa in 1941. The house was restored and furnished with 150-year-old furniture reflecting the Lucas residency during the 1840s -1850s. The seven room house does not have closets. In 1844, closets were considered rooms and property taxes were based on the number of rooms in the house. More rooms meant higher taxes. Plum Grove was altered after it was sold by the Lucas family. People who bought Plum Grove remodeled it. The State of Iowa restored it to its original condition.

Robert Lucas had eight children. With Elizabeth Brown, his first wife who died, he had one daughter, Minerva, who married and had children by the time he and Friendly moved to Plum Grove. Robert and Friendly had seven children: four sons and three daughters. The two oldest sons, Sumner and Robert, died as children. When Robert and Friendly moved to Plum Grove in 1844, their eldest daughter, Abigail, had her own household. Their remaining two sons, two daughters, and a grandchild lived with Robert and Friendly at Plum Grove in the 1840s. The children were old enough to help with the farm and the household chores.

Robert and Friendly Lucas decided to spend the remainder of their lives in Iowa. They purchased 80 acres of land in March of 1844. Plum Grove was a working farm raising livestock and grain crops. Today Plum Grove stands on four acres of land.